

Person County Natural Areas Inventory

WHEELERS CHURCH BASIC FOREST

Site Number: 27

Size: 89 acres

Site Significance: County

Quadrangles: Hurdle Mills, Ridgeville

Ownership: private

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: This natural area contains a rather rare Upland Depression Swamp Forest east of Wheelers Church Road. West of this road is a decent quality Basic Oak-Hickory Forest, which is uncommon in the region.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: This site is quite isolated from all others in the county. In fact, the nearest natural area is roughly 4.5 miles to the east – Alderidge Creek Flats.

SITE DESCRIPTION: Portions of southwestern Person County are underlain by various mafic rocks, as evidenced on the surface by dark brown soils of the Orange, Enon, and/or Mecklenburg series. In the vicinity of Wheelers Church are flats composed of these soils, with the parent rock material being metamorphosed gabbro and diorite. The Basic Oak-Hickory Forest north of the church and west of Hesters Church has been selectively thinned in the past, but is in fair-good condition now. It is dominated by southern shagbark hickory (*Carya carolinae-septentrionalis*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), southern red oak (*Q. falcata*), and sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*). Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) and sweetgum are common in the understory. Shrubs are rather infrequent, but they include several species of viburnums (*Viburnum rafinesquianum* and *V. prunifolium*). Herbs are also sparse, but vines such as Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolius*), muscadine grape (*Vitis rotundifolia*), and the non-native Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) cover much of the forest floor. Notable herbs, at the forest edge, are curly-heads (*Clematis ochroleuca*) and obovate Barbara's-buttons (*Marshallia obovata*).

To the east of Wheelers Church Road (SR 1002) is a small, fair-quality example of the scarce Upland Depression Swamp Forest. The actual depression is roughly 100 feet by 100 feet. The canopy is dominated by willow oak (*Q. phellos*) and sweetgum. Black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), and white oak are also present. Red maple is the primary understory tree. The shrub layer around the depression consists mainly of highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) and common greenbrier (*Smilax rotundifolia*). Two species of sedges (*Carex* spp.) are present. Water is only occasionally present in the depression, and no sphagnum moss was noted on the 1993 site visit (though other moss species are present.) The depression has a natural drain to the northeast, and thus is not a true depression with no outlet.

NOTE: This site was not surveyed in 2005-06. The natural area was viewed from Wheelers Church Road during this period, and it was determined that the forested areas are still present, though details of any impacts could not be assessed.

PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT: Because this unprotected site does not have a high